Depot Town Rag

May 2008

Ypsilanti's supply side of town

100% FREE *RAG* CONTENT

Volume 22, Number 3

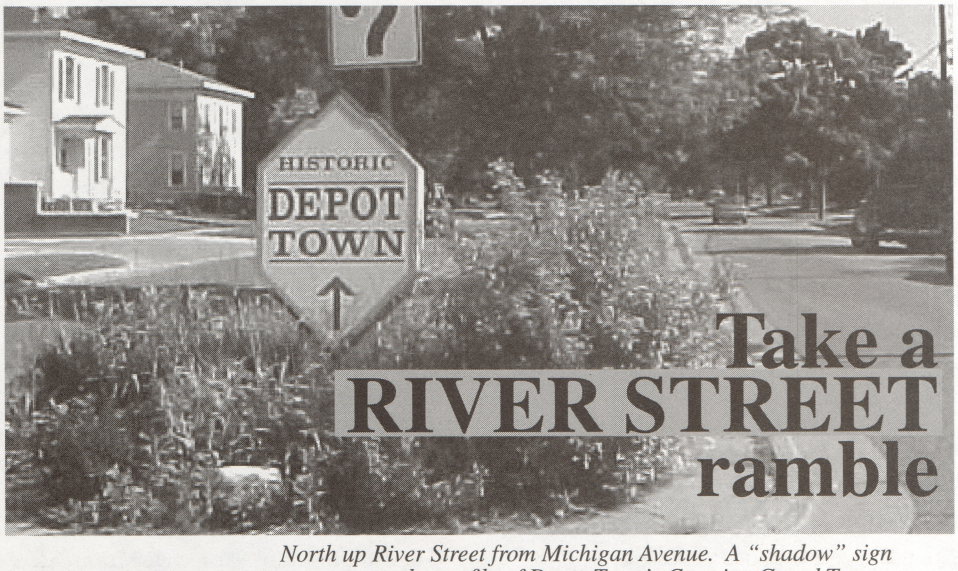
A PUBLICATION OF THE DEPOT TOWN ASSOCIATION, INC. The Old Caboose, 400 Market Place, Ypsilanti, Michigan 48198

Take a walk down River Street

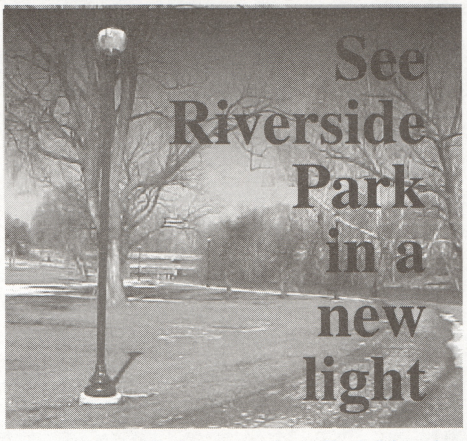
A pessimist could say River Street starts at the ill-fated Water Street Project and ends in the gloom of death at Highland and St. John's Cemeteries. An optimist, however, might point out how the street has its life source in the waters of the Huron River and progresses to the gates of heaven.

Between these extreme views is a mile-and-a-half stretch of the City's second most distinguished thoroughfare that earned vital place in manufacturing history. Creative entrepreneurs established their homes and businesses up and down Huron and River Streets in the early days of Ypsilanti, but River Street gets less recognition. For many, it was just a route to the other side of the tracks, but more creative personalities saw it as the connection to the dynamics of the world of business and industry.

River Street doesn't get all the respect it deserves. First of all, it's more than a street; it's a boulevard. But Ypsi adores the mansions on the west side of the Huron; the east side has always been the blue-collar side. Huron had the investors; River had the inventors.



North up River Street from Michigan Avenue. A "shadow" sign repeats the profile of Depot Town's Crossing Guard Tower

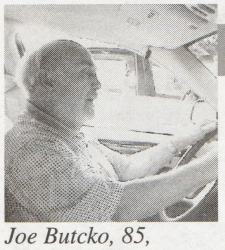


24 new street lights were installed this winter in Riverside Park by funds raised through the Depot Town Association's ElvisFest, Heritage Festival, BeerFest, JayCees, DDA and the City that were matched by a State grant for a grand total of $168,000. Part of the grant will go into spring repairs of the Tridge connecting Riverside Park with Frog Island and Depot Town.

With more improvements planned, Depot Town's Community Development Corporation has received several new grants:

- $20,000 from the Washtenaw County Administration for design of Riverside & Frog Island parks.
- $15,000 from Fifth Third Bank for capacity building.
- $2,000 from Ypsilanti Community Fund for a feasability study on a CDC proposed Ribfest for 2008 or 2009.

Cruise some happy memories of River Street *-Joe Butcko*



Joe Butcko, 85, drives down River Street to tell its story through the years

My parents owned a four-acre truck farm at the site of the original Ford Starter & Generator plant in Ypsilanti. Ford bought the land from them for $4000, a fortune in the 1920s. My parents then built a home at 634 Harriet Street for $2000. The house still stands and is in very good condition. There were only four homes on Harriet then. My mother passed away in 1929; my father and the family of five boys moved to 214 East Forest Avenue, now the site of the Forest Avenue Baptist Church.

In 1932 there were only about six houses on the north side of Forest Avenue from River Street to Prospect. It was all farmland owned by the Peck family whose house and barns were on Forest about 150 yards east of River Street. The Peck farm was a working farm with horses, cows, etc. Parents would send their kids with a bucket to get milk. Mr. Peck would let us watch him milk the cows and, with a twist of his wrist, he would squirt us in the face with the milk. Today, he would be put in jail—the milk wasn't pasteurized.

Among Peck's other enterprises, the City hired him to clear sidewalks with his horse pulling a wooden snowplow.

At Forest and River was the Swain home where remnants of a malt factory still stand. On the southwest corner was Maude Leslie's store that opened in 1936.

At River and Holmes, during the Depression (1929-1940), Clow's Welding Shop was among the prosperous enterprises in town because few folks could afford new equipment; consequently, everything had to be repaired, especially farm tools like plows and cultivators. *[continued overleaf]*

River Street tour

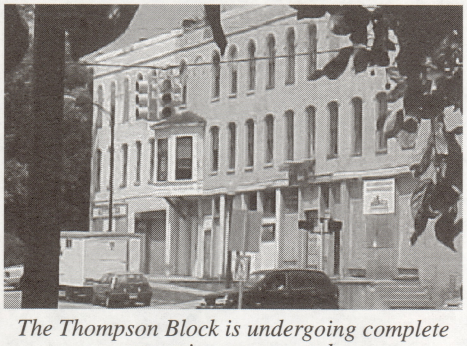
[continued from page one]

Garage where Crescive Die & Tool began

In 1953 rented a 400 square foot garage attached to Clow's building. I started Crescive Die & Tool. When we sold it in 2000 it had grown to 400 thousand square feet with plants in Saline and Milan. We grew with the help of sons & grandsons, and it all started on Ypsilanti's River Street.

At Forest and Norris was the Monroe Foundry. They made castings for machine tools, presses, lathes, and more. Later they made products for Craftsman Tools. Adjacent to the Foundry, John Lonsky started a machine shop. Monroe & Lonsky merged and became Central Specialty. After a few more transitions it became Motor Wheel, employing several hundred people. The buildings are all gone now except the office building on Norris Street that is now the Corner Brewery.

Just west of Norris Street to the railroad tracks is Michigan Ladder Company, the oldest manufacturer in Ypsilanti—possibly in Washtenaw County. It is 110+ years old and remains in the same family.



The Thompson Block is undergoing complete restoration process today

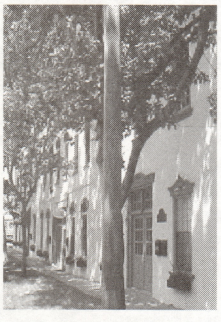
On River at Cross Street is the large pre-Civil War building. I remember when O.E. Thompson manufactured toys, pull wagons, scooters, and farm implements like hand-held corn planters there.

Across the street is the home of the Miller Motors Hudson dealership now the Ypsilanti Automotive Heritage Museum. That building had housed Crown Fender who manufactured fenders for everything from bicycles, surreys, and autos. Before GM and Ford became giants, there were over 2000 automobile wanna-bees. In Michigan, every other blacksmith shop was trying to reinvent the auto—from gasoline to wood-burning engines—and they needed two things: investors and fenders. There was even an Anhut auto, related to Ypsilanti's Bill Anhut family.

Double windows were for the junk yard weigh-station entry

Behind the Sidetrack was Rubin's Junkyard. There was a large barn and the entire yard was shielded by a high board fence.

Just south of the railroad tracks is a brick building now housing the Ypsilanti Food Co-op. Before the turn of the 20th century this building housed a machine tool company. In 1965, I went to Springfield, Massachusetts to buy my first new punch press. In the lobby of the Perkins Press Company was a framed newspaper picture and story of the Perkins Company in that Ypsilanti building, telling how they started on River Street in Ypsilanti. They moved to Massachusetts about 1909.

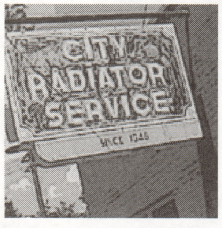


The Ypsilanti Food Co-op thrives here now

Also in that building were two tool & die makers: Bill Britton and Cliff Simons. They started Universal Die Cast Company with one machine. They moved to a new building in Saline, bought several companies including Hoover Ball Company, and later became among the largest shareholders of Johnson Control, among the largest auto parts manufacturers in the world.

At the south end, another building housed Striker Die & Tool Company. Ed Striker was the uncle of the boy whose body was found under the bridge that goes from Cross Street to Frog Island—Depot Town's still-unsolved mystery.

112 North River, next to the Octagon House, a brick building was the George L. Ennen Manufacturing Company. They made parts for the Hudson and Terraplane autos and built a new building on Emerick street, alongside Striker's new building. The Ennen plant on River Street still stands. Among other things, it served as the Secretary of State's office, City Radiator, etc.



Now vacant, the former City Radiator Service building is for sale again

In the Lutheran parking lot was the Bloom Junk yard. At the end of River Street was the city's largest junkyard, later named Ypsilanti Iron & Metal. Junk yards were a viable part of the county, due to the many foundries that bought the metal from them. Also there were processors of rags and paper that would buy from them, process the material and sell to the mills.

Iron & Metal site awaits the fate of the Water Street Project

East of the junkyard was a large lumberyard. It seemed a train was constantly going down the tracks on Lincoln Street, across Michigan Avenue to the lumber yard and beyond to the Ford Plant.

West of the junkyard was Motor State Products that developed and manufactured automatic convertible tops for all the automobile companies. Prior to the automatic top, it was a two–person job to put a top up or down. They employed several hundred people, ran three shifts, and were the highest

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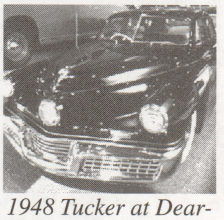
hourly-paying factory in the county.

At Park and Babbitt Street was the home of Preston Tucker. Behind the house was a large wooden barn about 100 feet long and 40 feet wide. Before World War II after the invasion of Poland, defense contracts were awarded to any industry that could qualify and Tucker had such an operation; he won a contract to develop a marine engine for the Higgins Boat Company's landing craft. It was to be developed in that building with 100 employees working two twelve-hour shifts, seven days a week. I was one of the 100 employees comprised of toolmakers, engineers, machinists, motor mechanics, and office personnel. The chief engineer was Japanese and spoke little English. Included with the 100 employees were machine tools, lathes, milling machines, grinders, etc. We were so crowded, the mice were hunch-backed.

I was only in that building about seven months while Higgins' new building was being built in New Orleans.The entire crew went to the new plant to build engines that were designed and developed in a barn in Ypsilanti in early 1942.

Across the street on Babbitt was an all-metal 60' X 200' building housing the Tucker Machine Tool Company that remained in full operation until war's end in 1945. Then it was used to develop Tucker's car—until 1948 when he moved to Chicago to begin production of his ill-fated dream car.

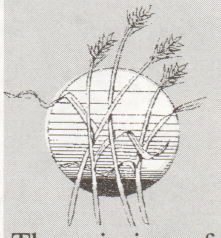


1948 Tucker at Dearborn's Henry Ford Museum

Behind that was a large brick building fronting on Grove Street, the foundry of the American Radiator Company, a manufacturer of Whistler Steam Radiators for homes and offices. It whistled as it leaked steam.

Tucker sold both this building and the metal building to Marsh Plating and it remains today. The city closed off the east portion of Babbitt Street so Marsh could expand. Marsh Plating has expanded from Michigan Avenue north to the railroad tracks.

-Joe Butcko, now 83 years old, still drives up and down Ypsilanti's River Street and is one of his generation's great story-tellers.



The Ypsilanti Food Co-op

The mission of the Ypsilanti Food Co-op is to provide high quality food and goods, produced ecologically and sustainably while practicing cooperative economics.

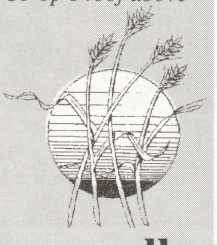
A not-for-profit cooperative, locally owned by the consumers who use the store, serving Ypsilanti since 1975, moved to Depot Town in 1984. Corinne Sikorski is the longest-serving manager of a business on the block.

Why shop the Co-op?

- The Co-op is locally owned and supports local farmers and businesses.
- The Co-op offers a wide range of high quality foods with minimal processing and without artificial additives. They carry a wide range of competitively priced, organically grown foods and consistently research and investigate old and new products to make sure to offer products of high quality to the members and community.
- Food may be purchased in small amounts for just what is needed, or large amounts for bigger savings. Through special order programs, one may order items not usually carried—as well as bulk quantities and receive 30-50% discounts off regular prices.
- The Co-op fosters sound ecological practices and promotes active recycling. Shoppers bring their own bags and containers for the many items carried in bulk, purchase new containers available in the store, or reuse containers customers have returned. Milk is available in returnable glass bottles.
- Co-op shoppers know where their food dollars are going. Their money is being reinvested in a consumer-owned business, not a large multi-national corporation.

If it takes 8 1/2 minutes for sunlight to reach the Ypsilanti Food Co-op, how long will it take the rest of the planet to go solar? The Food Co-op is the first to go solar on this block. See solar collectors on the Co-op's roof above

Ypsilanti Food Co-op hours:
9 a.m.-9 p.m.
Seven days a week



What the Co-op sells:

Fresh Produce	Fresh Deli
Bulk Foods	Dairy
Meat & Fish	Natural Groceries
Frozen Foods	Healthy snacks!

Books & Greeting Cards
Herbs, Spices, Teas, & Coffee
Vitamins & Supplements

Household Supplies	Natural Body Care
Alternative Diet	Gifts & Extras

Internationally accepted cooperative principles:

- **Open and voluntary membership**
- **Democratic member control**
- **Education on food choices**
- **Support of other co-operatives**

How do I join the Co-op?

To become a member/owner, each individual purchases shares in the Co-op similar to buying stock in a large corporation. The total "Fair Share" investment to be paid is $200. To be an active member, the Fair Share can be paid in $20 increments over ten years—or all at once. New members also pay a $10 non-refundable administrative fee their first year.

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Depot Town plans for Cancer Society event

Relay For Life starts here again

The nation's largest, most successful nonprofit event, the American Cancer Society's Relay For Life, is coming to Ypsilanti. More than 4,800 communities have already started fighting back against cancer through Relay For Life, and Ypsilanti will join in this worldwide movement to end cancer on June 21-22, 2008 at 10 a.m. in Riverside Park, Depot Town. Activities will include a cancer survivor celebration and victory lap, a luminaria ceremony to honor and remember everyone touched by the disease, and a new Fight Back ceremony to empower community members to take action against cancer.

Anyone interested in learning more about this moving, 24-hour experience should contact Cathie McClure at 734.223.1484 or visit www.acsevents.org/relay/mi/ypsilanti

If you have a question about cancer or the Relay, contact the American Cancer Society at 1.800.ACS.2345. The Society provides patient support and information 24 hours a day, seven days a week——because cancer never sleeps.

In the next *Rag*

Down by the depot when Buffalo Bill brought his world-famous Wild West Show to Ypsilanti's Fair Grounds in 1901

Depot Town Rag

"All the news that fits, we print"
A monthly publication of
the Depot Town Association, Inc.
400 Market Place, The Old Caboose
Ypsilanti, Michigan 48198
To the editor:
thomasdodd@comcast.net

The Depot Town Association, Inc.

Gary McKeever, President
Merrill Guerra, Vice President
Carole Clare, Treasurer
Sandee French, Scy. & Past President
Website: www.depottown.org

DTA meets at 6:30 p.m on the third Wednesday of each month at Café Luwak, 42 East Cross Street.

Ypsi Auto Museum featured in city slicker

Ypsilanti's Automotive Heritage Museum received a two-page coverage in HOURDetroit magazine, a slicker whose January issue was dedicated to "Driving Dreams." Amid a panoply of auto features (auto wives, the pleasure of shifting gears, alternative engines, picturing car culture, and 13 notable American cars), HOUR featured "Adopted Autos," a two-page story on the Ypsilanti Automotive Heritage Museum and June's Orphan Car Show.

www.depottown.org

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The 2008 Ypsilanti Depot Town Farmers' Market opens in late April on the Market Plaza and stretches past the Freighthouse toward Forest Avenue—featuring excellent produce, flowers, plants, baked goods and handmade craft items.

May 3 & 10
Celebrate Mother's Day
Paint A Pot For Mother's Day
$5 per pot and one free flower for every mother!

May 31
End-of-Month Plant Sale

May 24
Flower Day

MORE INFO:
www.ydtfm.org or
www.ypsilantidepottown-farmersmarket.org

Ypsilanti's Farmers' Market

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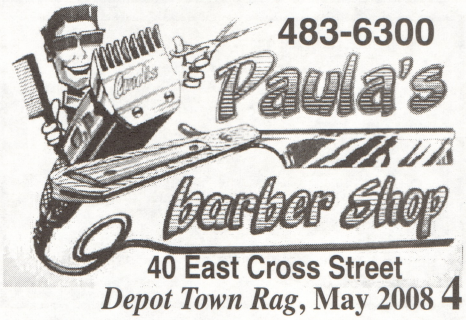

Hutchinson's "Casa Loma" is now the home of High Scope Educational Research Foundation

A River Street Ramble from water to the grave

Norris saw Depot Town's great progress from his front porch

River Street residences range from original settler Mark Norris's modest Greek Revival home to Percy Bysch Hutchinson's magnificent mansion. It was Norris's lumber mill and Hutchinson's S&H Green Stamps that set the pace for many of the successes to come

East Side/West Side 1840-1849

-from Harvey C. Colburn's The Story of Ypsilanti, 1921

A description of the East Side business section would be incomplete without mention of the places where the males of the community gathered for relaxation and social converse. There was a billiard room, a bowling-alley, and saloons of varying but always adequate number. Three cents was the price of a good cigar, a drink of whiskey, or a glass of cream ale, lager beer being unknown.

…Although the East Side was, in certain lines, the center of village activity, the West Side maintained with it an aggressive competition. Michigan Avenue, from the Hawkins House to the river, was well lined with frame stores buildings of cheap construction, which provided well for the village and country trade.

South end of River Street looks like a war zone today

Look where progress has taken us. The Water Street Development at the south end of River Street has diminished the street's historic glory and luster.

"It's a great set for a horror movie," said an EMU film major who lives in the neighborhood. "It is a horror movie," noted a former City Councilmember.

Developers have pulled out of their committments to rehabilitate this section into commercial and residential properties backing up to the Huron River. Meanwhile, the City government is in a financial crisis.

(eWashtenaw 1998 aerial survey)

FREE Summer Music Series

May 24
2 p.m. Saturday
Ypsilanti Symphony Orchestra
Riverside Park

June 4- July 9
7 p.m. every Wednesday
JAZZY NIGHTS
WCC Community Jazz Band
Frog Island Park

July 14
7:30 p.m. Tuesday
STARS & STRIPES FOREVER
Ypsilanti Community Band
Riverside Park

June 1-September 14
Every Friday
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Hours:
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Sat 10am-5pm
Sun. noon-5pm

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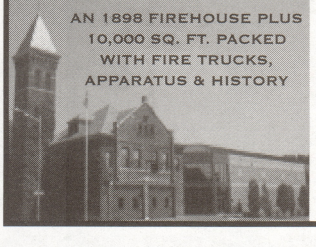
Museum: 734-482-4990 *Archives: 734-217-8236*

MICHIGAN FIREHOUSE MUSEUM



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RAGTIME Coming events

'Tis the season

25th Anniversary Concert

Ypsilanti Community Choir
Friday, May 2 - 8 p.m.
Emmanuel Lutheran Church
201 North River Street
free

3 May
SHOW & SHINE
Ypsilanti Area Street Rod Car Show & Swap Meet

17 May 9-noon
Ypsi P.R.I.D.E. Day
Let's get this place cleaned up!
Details: www:ypsichamber.org

24 May 2 p.m.
YPSILANTI SYMPHONY ORCHESTRA
Riverside Park

26 May
MEMORIAL DAY PROCESSION
On Memorial (Cross Street) Bridge and on to Highland Cemetery

1 June
ORPHAN CAR SHOW
Riverside Park

June-September
MOTORCYCLE MANIA & CRUISE NIGHTS
Tuesdays & Thursdays
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...to the grave

Highland Cemetery's Starkweather Memorial Chapel can be found on Wikipedia's "Richardsonian Romanesque" listing of architecture built after the style of Henry Hobson Richardson

Historic Highland Cemetery has anchored the north end of River Street since its dedication July 14, 1864. Designed by Colonel James Lewis Glenn of Niles, Michigan, the cemetery was meant to be "an oasis for the living as well as a place for the repose of the dead." Glenn's design created a natural garden-like setting of winding drives and walks filled with flowers, shrubs, and trees as well as monuments which reflected a wide spectrum of architectural styles.

Highlights of a walking tour here are the **Leetch Gates** at the entry from River Street, the **1880 Sexton's Cottage** built in a Victorian Swiss-cottage style, and the Richardsonian Romanesque **Starkweather Chapel** designed in 1888-1890 by George Dewitt Mason and Zachariah Rice. Wikipedia's encyclopedia entry describes the Chapel as "clearly-articulated clustered forms in a mock-military exercise in rustication," but most school kids say it's just a cool place to imagine living in!

Wander Highland's naturalistic trails to discover the **Civil War Veterans' Monument**, the 1906 **Quirk Columbarium**, and the nearby **Quirk Mausoleum**.

Among the gravesites a visitor will find the final resting place of the young Irishman **Walter Oakman**, the first white man to die in Washtenaw County (1824).

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